

Oral History Program: Biographical Notes

Douglas James TAYLOR (1916 -)

Marine Engineer

Birth & Family: Douglas Taylor was born 24 October 1916 in Crown Street, Sydney and lived at Service Avenue, South Ashfield. His father was a Lecturer in Agriculture at Hurlstone Agricultural College. He had one younger brother.

Education: Taylor attended Summer Hill Intermediate High (approximately 1928-1931), and Canterbury High (1932), leaving to take up an apprenticeship in Marine Engineering before exceeding the age limit. Sydney Technical College, Diploma in Marine Engineering (1932-1937).

Qualifications: Marine Engineer's Apprenticeship 1937
2nd Class Motor Certificate
Chief Engineer's Motor Certificate – London County Council School of Engineering
Chief's Steam Certificate

Memberships: Fellow of the Institute of Marine Engineers (London)

Awards:

Work History: In 1932 he began a Marine Engineer's apprenticeship with Howard Smith's ship repair workshops at Adolphus Street, Balmain, at the same time studying a Diploma course in this discipline at Sydney Technical College.

After completion of his apprenticeship in 1937 Taylor arranged to be taken on as a passage-working engineer on a British ship, and in February 1938 joined a Port Line ship the "Port Auckland", a coal-burning steamer, sailing to London via the Pacific and Panama Canal.

Upon arrival in London the Port Line signed him on as a 6th Engineer and he spent a short time working the English Coast and Continent, first in the "Port Auckland" and then in another coal-burner, the "Port Adelaide". He was then transferred to a motor ship, the "Port Chalmers", as a junior engineer, carrying refrigerated cargoes. Shortly afterwards, war was declared. After a journey from New Zealand back to England, Taylor had gained enough qualifying sea time to sit for his 2nd Class Motor Certificate at the London County Council School of Marine Engineering at Poplar.

After leaving Port Line, he accepted a position with the Blue Star Line in London on their "Sydney Star" to gain experience with different types of diesel engines. This ship was fitted with early-type B&W double-acting 2 stroke engines which required much heavy work to keep them operating.

After returning to England from a journey to New Zealand, the ship was loaded at Liverpool with troop and machinery reinforcements, sailing as part of a convoy to the Middle East via South Africa and the Suez Canal, then finally to Bombay, Colombo and eventually Australia.

Taylor became ill in Melbourne and was flown home to Sydney. Upon his recovery he joined the Australian hospital ship HMAHS "Wanganella"

(Huddart Parker Line), and sailed to Singapore before it fell and to the Middle East, bringing back sick and wounded soldiers.

Having achieved the qualifying sea time, he successfully sat for his Chief Engineers' Motor Certificate in Sydney, rejoining the ship as a Senior Watch Engineer. After 4 or 5 trips on the "Wanganella" he left to get some qualifying steam experience to sit for the Steam Endorsement of the diesel certificate.

Taylor then joined a passenger ship, the Huddart Parker Line's "Nairana", an old coal-burning steam turbine-driven ship now on the Melbourne-Tasmania passenger service, carrying service personnel. After serving the required amount of sea service, he sat for and obtained his Steam Endorsement on the Motor Certificate (Chiefs Steam Certificate) and returned to the "Wanganella" as a senior engineer. He also sailed on coastal runs on the steamship "Barwon" between Sydney and Fremantle with general cargo, and on "Corio" on the Black & Tan run loading coal at Newcastle for Geelong power station then to Whyalla for iron ore and back to Newcastle.

At the end of the war, Taylor decided to come ashore and became a Shift Engineer at Balmain Power Station where they commissioned their new section, the boilers, working at a pressure of 1,200 psi. However, not liking shiftwork, he resigned and joined the Sydney Water Board in the Plant Department (Mechanical). After a period in Head Office specification writing, he was transferred to Warragamba Dam Construction as Assistant Plant Engineer (Mechanical) in early 1948. This position involved laying out and building an emergency power station, engineering workshops, air compressor station workshops, earthmoving and motor vehicle maintenance.

After about 4 years in this job, he accepted a shore-based position as Assistant Superintendent Engineer with his original employer, Howard Smith Ltd, and was to remain with this company for the next 18 years. His duties in this position included the appointment and management of approximately 50 sea-going engineers; maintenance and engineer manning of their fleet of ships and the workshops; in charge of converting two of their ships from coal to oil full; major refits of two large steam tankers belonging to Caltex; troubleshooting wherever ships were in mechanical trouble anywhere in Australia. The old workshops at Balmain were closed down and new workshops built at Birchgrove.

Taylor was then invited to join the Commonwealth Department of Shipping & Transport (now A.M.S.A.) as an Engineer Ship Surveyor and Examiner of Marine Engineers (when they were sitting for their 2nd and Chief Engineers Certificates). Among his duties as a surveyor were the personal witness and testing of safety equipment on ships; investigation of shipping accidents involving both ships and personnel; tonnage measurement for registration and identification purposes; inspection of vessels suspected of being "ships of shame" i.e. unsafe vessels.

Upon reaching the age of 65, Taylor was asked to stay on until the age of 66½ - the longest extension allowable in the Commonwealth Service – finally retiring in April 1983.

Prepared by Jill Willis, March 2003 from oral history interview conducted on 09.10.2000.